

Message Text

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AMCONSUL NICE

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GENEVA FOR CSCEDL AND DISTO; VIENNA FOR MBFRDEL;

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PFOR, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: WHAT A GISCARD
VICTORY WOULD MEAN

1. SUMMARY. AS PRESIDENT OF FRANCE, GISCARD WOULD NOT BE LIKELY, AT LEAST AT THE OUTSET, TO CHANGE BASICALLY FRENCH FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICIES AS PRACTICED UNDER POMPIDOU. HE WOULD BE MORE FLEXIBLE IN THEIR APPLICATIONS, HOWEVER. FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS SHOULD BECOME WARMER, THOUGH THEIR SUBSTANCE WOULD CHANGE LITTLE AT FIRST. WHILE GISCARD FAVORS EUROPEAN ECONOMIC UNITY, IT IS NOT CLEAR HOW FAR HE WOULD OR COULD GO IN THIS DIRECTION. A POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONSERVATIVE, GISCARD WOULD FACE POTENTIAL LABOR UNREST, AND THEREFORE WOULD BE COMPELLED TO GO FURTHER IN HIS SOCIAL PROGRAM THAN HE OTHERWISE WOULD BE INCLINED TO DO. END SUMMARY.

2. GISCARD THE MAN. DESPITE HIS ATTEMPTS DURING THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN TO PORTRAY HIMSELF AS A CENTRIST,

GISCARD IS FUNDAMENTALLY A CONSERVATIVE. HIS BACKGROUND, EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE LEAD HIM NATURALLY TO A POSITION ON THE CENTER-RIGHT OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM. WHILE GISCARD'S BACKGROUND IS LESS PURELY POLITICAL THAN THE MORE TRADITIONAL CAREERS OF CHABAN AND MITTERRAND, IT SHOULD BE REMEMBERED THAT HE HAS HEADED ONE OF THE MOST POLITICALLY SENSITIVE OF FRENCH MINISTRIES FOR A TOTAL OF WELL OVER EIGHT YEARS. HIS KNOWN DISLIKE OF EMOTION COULD MAKE FOR MORE RESTRAINED, IF NOT LESS PRECISE, FRENCH POLICYMAKING.

3. DOMESTIC POLICY. WHILE GISCARD HAS GIVEN HIS CAMPAIGN PROGRAM A HEALTHY DASH OF SOCIAL REFORM MEASURES, HE REMAINS OF COURSE OUTDISTANCED BY MITTERRAND IN THIS REGARD. PERHAPS CHARACTERISTIC OF GISCARD'S ATTITUDE IS A RECENT STATEMENT THAT "REAL REFORMS ARE THOSE ONE MAKES WITHOUT SPENDING MONEY." GISCARD'S ORIENTATION
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IS CERTAINLY TOWARDS A CAPITALIST ECONOMY, BUT IT IS CAPITALISM OF A FRENCH VARIETY, WHERE GOVERNMENT PLAYS A SUBSTANTIAL, OFTEN OVERBEARING ROLE IN ECONOMIC DECISIONS AND ACTIVITIES. A GISCARD VICTORY COULD MEAN LABOR UNREST, PARTICULARLY SINCE HIS ELECTORAL MARGIN IS LIKELY TO BE THIN, THE LEFT SEES HIM AS A SYMBOL OF THE CONSERVATIVE RIGHT, AND THE UNIONS WOULD NOT FEEL IMPELLED TO MAKE HIS TASK EASIER. AT MOST HE WOULD HAVE ONLY A FEW

MONTHS (AT LEAST UNTIL SEPTEMBER) TO IMPLEMENT SOME MEANINGFUL SOCIAL REFORM MEASURES IF HE IS TO AVOID SERIOUS LABOR TROUBLES. INDICATIONS ARE THAT GISCARD IS WELL AWARE OF THIS PROBLEM AND IS PREPARED TO ACT QUICKLY, IF ELECTED, TO INTRODUCE MODERATE SOCIAL WELFARE REFORMS. (SEPTEL ON CANDIDATES' ECONOMIC PLATFORMS WILL AMPLIFY GISCARD'S DOMESTIC ECONOMIC POLICY).

4. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS. GISCARD'S OWN POLITICAL BASE IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IS QUITE SMALL, SOME 55 INDEPENDENT REPUBLICAN DEPUTIES OUT OF 490 SEATS. HE NOW WOULD ALSO ENJOY THE SUPPORT OF 30 TO 40 CENTRIST DEPUTIES DRAWN FROM THE LECANUET WING OF THE REFORMIST GROUP AS WELL AS MOST OF THE CENTRIST DEPUTIES IN THE PRESENT MAJORITY. THESE, PLUS SOME GAULLIST SUPPORT, WILL ENABLE GISCARD TO START WITH THE SUPPORT OF ABOUT

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130-150 DEPUTIES. AS HE DOES NOT FULLY SHARE THE GAULLIST IDEOLOGY, HE WOULD SEE NO NEED TO STRIVE TO MAINTAIN THE UNITY OF THE UDR EVEN THOUGH HE WOULD RELY ON THEM FOR VOTES. THE UDR, ALREADY DISHEARTENED AT HAVING LOST THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, IN TIME COULD SPLIT. IN ANY CASE, A GISCARD PRESIDENCY WOULD MEAN THE END OF GAULLISM AS THE PRIME MOVING FORCE IN THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT AND ITS DOMINATION OF FRENCH POLITICS, AND A PARTIAL RETURN TO THE POLITICAL JOCKEYING AND MANEUVERING CHARACTERISTIC OF THE FOURTH REPUBLIC, WITH GREATER PARLIAMENTARY INFLUENCE ON THE GOVERNMENT DUE TO A LESS COHERENT AND DISCIPLINED MAJORITY. EVENTUALLY GISCARD COULD TRY TO MOVE FRANCE TOWARD A MORE PURELY PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM, WITH TOTAL SEPARATION OF POWERS BETWEEN LEGISLATIVE AND EXECUTIVE BRANCHES -- POSSIBLY BY HOLDING A REFERENDUM. (ONE OF GISCARD'S CLOSE POLITICAL ADVISORS, WHO DESCRIBES HIM AS "VERY PRESIDENTIAL," SAYS HE IS THINKING ABOUT SUCH A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE LATER IN HIS TERM OF OFFICE.)

5. US RELATIONS. WIDELY REGARDED IN FRANCE AS THE "AMERICAN" CANDIDATE, GISCARD PROBABLY WOULD OFFER THE

BEST HOPE AMONG THE MAJOR PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDERS FOR IMPROVING US-FRENCH RELATIONS. WE SHOULD NOT OVERESTIMATE THIS HOPE, HOWEVER. IT IS TRUE THAT GISCARD HAS MUCH BROADER EXPERIENCE IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS THAN EITHER CHABAN-DELMAS OR MITTERRAND. ADDITIONALLY, HE LACKS THE GAULLIST IMPULSE TO DISPLAY AGGRESSIVE FRENCH INDEPENDENCE FOR ITS OWN SAKE ON ALL OCCASIONS. IT WOULD BE A

MISTAKE TO ASSUME, HOWEVER, THAT GISCARD AS PRESIDENT WOULD ATTACH LESS IMPORTANCE TO THE DEFENSE OF FRANCE'S NATIONAL INTERESTS THAN HAVE THE GAULLISTS. IT SHOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN THAT, UNDER GISCARD'S LEADERSHIP, FRANCE FREQUENTLY OPPOSED IMPORTANT US OBJECTIVES IN THE TRADE AND MONETARY REFORM FIELDS DURING THE PERIOD 1971-73, A RECORD FOR WHICH HE IS PROUDLY CLAIMING CREDIT IN THE ELECTORAL DEBATE. ON THE OTHER HAND, GISCARD WAS REPORTEDLY UNHAPPY ABOUT THE GOF DECISION TO STAY OUT OF THE ENERGY COORDINATION GROUP, ALTHOUGH HE DECLINED TO CHALLENGE POMPIDOU'S DECISION. AT THE LEAST, HOWEVER, CONFIDENTIAL

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THE CONDUCT OF US-FRENCH RELATIONS WOULD BE EASIER, AND GISCARD'S TONE AND STYLE SHOULD BE LESS PROVOCATIVE THAN

THOSE OF POMPIDOU AND JOBERT. BUT IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THERE WOULD BE ANY IMMEDIATE MAJOR CHANGES. GISCARD HAS SAID THAT HE FAVORED PARTNERSHIP WITH THE US AS LONG AS IT DID NOT RESULT IN FRENCH DEPENDENCE ON THE US. SINCE REAL INDEPENDENCE IN THE MODERN WORLD IS SOMEWHAT ILLUSORY, GISCARD SAYS HE PREFERS TO EMPHASIZE "NON-DEPENDENCE FOR FRANCE. MOREOVER, HE PUT THIS COMMENT IN THE FRAMEWORK OF A CONTINUATION OF POMPIDOLIAN POLICY. FOR THE LONGER TERM, HOWEVER, HIS ALLIANCE WITH JEAN LECANUET COULD SIGNAL SOME MOVEMENT TOWARDS A MORE "ATLANTIC" ORIENTATION IN GOF FOREIGN POLICY.

6. GISCARD WOULD NEED UDR NATIONAL ASSEMBLY VOTES IN ORDER TO GOVERN, AND GAULLIST DEPUTIES WOULD LOOK PARTICULARLY CLOSELY AT ANY DEVIATION FROM CURRENT FRENCH FOREIGN POLICY LINES. GISCARD WOULD PROBABLY FEEL LITTLE PUBLIC PRESSURE TO CHANGE DRASTICALLY THE DIRECTION OF FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS SINCE A RECENT POLL HAS INDICATED SOME 63 PERCENT OF THE FRENCH POPULATION TO BE IN FAVOR OF POMPIDOU'S FOREIGN POLICY LINE. AMERICAN

BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC INTERESTS WOULD PROBABLY FIND THAT A GISCARD GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTINUE THE PRESENT APPROACH TOWARDS APPLICATION OF FRENCH CONTROLS IN A WAY THAT DOES NOT HAMPER DIRECT FOREIGN INVESTMENT.

7. DEFENSE. GISCARD WOULD CONTINUE THE SAME BASIC DEFENSE POLICY AS HIS PREDECESSORS. HE WOULD NOT REINTEGRATE FRANCE INTO THE NATO COMMAND STRUCTURE, ALTHOUGH HE SEES FRANCE'S SECURITY AS TIED TO THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. HE STATED IN LE MONDE INTERVIEW MAY 2 THAT HE WOULD MAINTAIN AND DEVELOP FRENCH STRATEGIC NUCLEAR FORCES. HE MIGHT BE SLIGHTLY MORE AMENABLE TO EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN ARMS PRODUCTION.

HE SAID IN THE MONDE INTERVIEW THAT EUROPE HAD "MUCH MORE
THE CAPACITY TO ASSUME ITS OWN DEFENSE THAN ONE MIGHT
THINK." IT HAS THE MEANS TO "ORGANIZE ITS OWN DEFENSE
MORE QUICKLY THAN ONE MIGHT BELIE
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WAS FOR THE LONG TERM. UNTIL GISCARD HAD ASSERTED CONTROL OVER THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY, HE WOULD BE UNLIKELY TO CHANGE FRENCH POLICY WITH RESPECT TO NON-SIGNATURE OF MULTILATERAL DISARMAMENT AGREEMENTS. HE HAS STATED THAT HE WOULD NOT CHANGE PRESENT FRENCH POLICY OF NON-PARTICIPATION IN THE GENEVA DISARMAMENT TALKS (CCD) AND MBFR.

8. EUROPEAN RELATIONS. GISCARD'S OWN PREDILECTIONS ARE TOWARD THE CREATION OF EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS. FOR INSTANCE, HE FAVORS DIRECT ELECTION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. HE UNDERSTANDS AND ACCEPTS THE NEED FOR FRANCE TO BELONG TO AND TO DEVELOP A UNITED EUROPE. HE STATES THE NEED FOR EUROPEAN UNITY BY 1980, BUT PUTS THIS IN A POMPIDOLIAN CONTEXT. THE KIND OF EUROPE HE ENVISAGES IS, HOWEVER, LESS CLEAR. HENCE, WHILE HE PROBABLY FEELS THAT EUROPEAN ECONOMIC UNITY SHOULD BE HASTENED, THERE IS NO CLEAR EVIDENCE THAT HE WOULD BE ANY MORE WILLING THAN PREVIOUS FRENCH GOVERNMENTS HAVE BEEN TO ACCEPT THE DEGREE OF TRANSFER OF POLITICAL POWER OR SOVEREIGNTY WHICH MANY FEEL SUCH ECONOMIC UNION WILL EVENTUALLY REQUIRE. NOR WOULD HE BARGAIN ANY LESS STRONGLY THAN HIS PREDECESSORS TO DEFEND FRENCH ECONOMIC INTERESTS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY.

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